

Information

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AIRLINE CEOs CALL FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP TO END CRISIS

This year's Spring Assembly of the Association of European Airlines' CEOs was clearly dominated by ongoing concerns of the airline chiefs about the manner in which the volcanic ash crisis has been handled.

"Although we acknowledge with relief that the actual volcano has ceased to erupt", said Willie Walsh, CEO of British Airways and this year's AEA Chairman, "we are still dissatisfied with the procedure applied throughout Europe. Should this volcano or any other erupt again, we must have assurances that our customers will not face chaos again. The current procedures, which are based on Member State authorities and Air Navigation Service Providers making operational decisions on flight safety based on theoretical modelling of ash dispersion carried out by the Volcanic Ash Advisory Centre in London, are inappropriate and must be replaced so that we will be prepared to deal with future volcanic eruptions without causing unnecessary disruption".

During a discussion with the eminent Icelandic geophysicist Professor Gudmundsson, AEA CEOs agreed that the quality of the data about the actual nature of the eruptions must be improved. Icelandair has supported the acquisition of a test aircraft, and further radar equipment has been sought by the Icelandic MET.

"The shutdown of airspace is not required to deal with volcanic eruptions. The key prerequisite to enabling safe operation is high quality, accurate data that identifies the presence of the visible ash that is a potential risk to flight safety", said Mr Walsh. "Europe must learn from best practice in the rest of the world and radically improve the quality of information made available to operators. This can and must be done rapidly".

AEA and other associations believe that the current procedure must be replaced by an approach which would adopt data sources deployed successfully and without any known incidents for many years in other regions of the world. Airlines also argue that pilots are trained to deal with extraordinary circumstances.

"Airline managements across the world see safety as the overriding priority", said the AEA Chairman. "Without the highest safety record, airlines cannot survive. Airlines successfully deal every day with weather and other events that pose very similar operating risks to volcanic ash.

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- Aegean Airlines
- Aer Lingus
- AeroSvit
- airBaltic
- Air France
- Air Malta
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- brussels airlines
- Cargolux
- Croatia Airlines
- Cyprus Airways
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- KLM
- LOT
- Lufthansa
- Luxair
- Malev
- Montenegro Airlines
- Olympic Air
- SAS Scandinavian Airlines
- SWISS
- TAP Portugal
- TAROM
- TNT Airways
- Turkish Airlines
- Ukraine International Airlines
- Virgin Atlantic Airways

AEA airlines will be meeting the European Commission in the near future to discuss how a solution can be found to move to a “new European approach” which is in line with international practice. They are adamant that the closures of airspace in recent weeks was unnecessary and that the damage incurred to passengers and airlines must be compensated by governments.

For further information, please contact:

David Henderson

Manager Information

Phone : +32(0) 2 639 89 72

Email: david.henderson@aea.be

www.aea.be

Note to the Editor: The Association of European Airlines (AEA) brings together 36 European established scheduled network carriers. These collectively carry 347 million passengers and 6 million tonnes of cargo each year, operating 2,160 aircraft serving 662 destinations in 162 countries with 11,400 flights a day. They provide around 385,000 jobs directly, and generate a total turnover of €70 billion